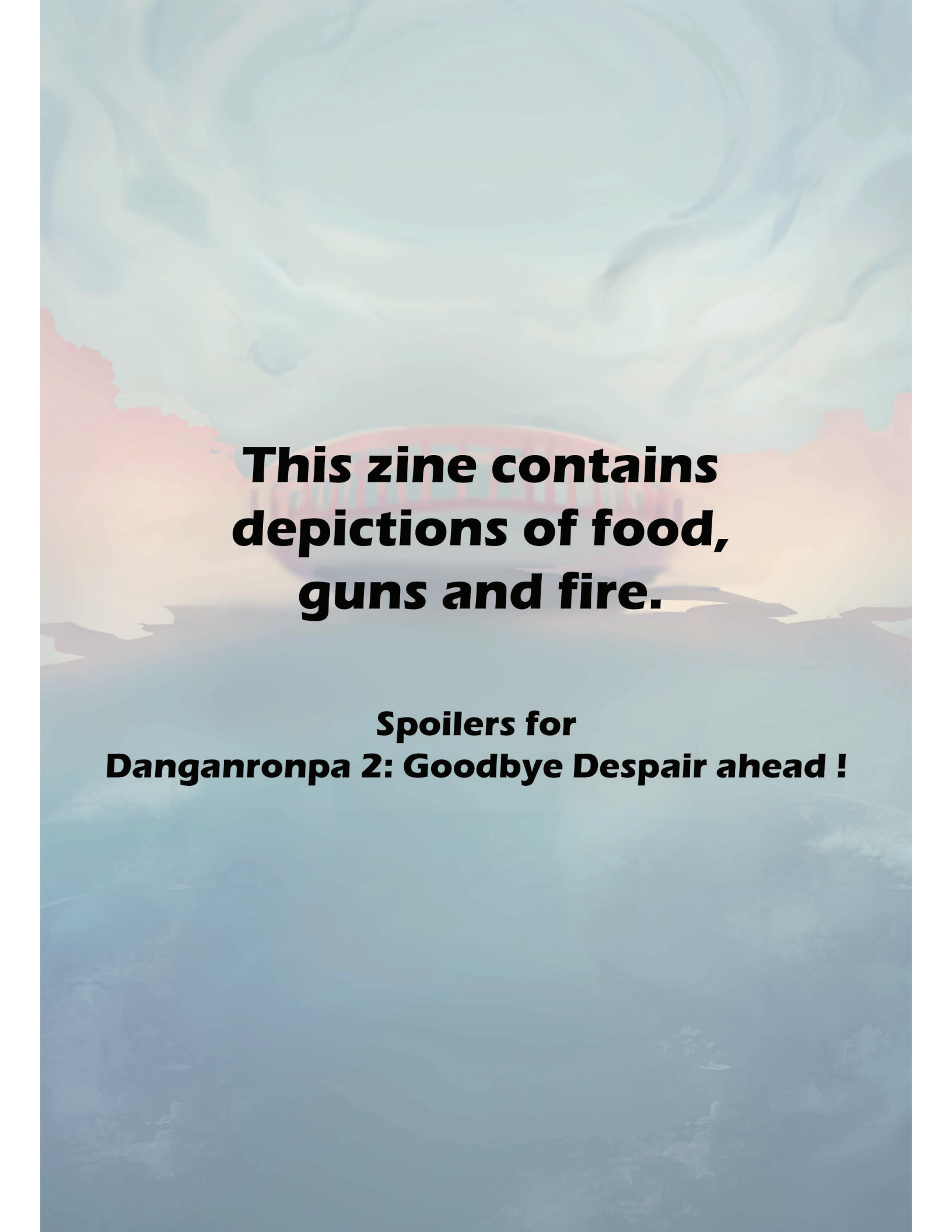




Hope

A NAGITO KOMAEDA POSITIVITY ZINE

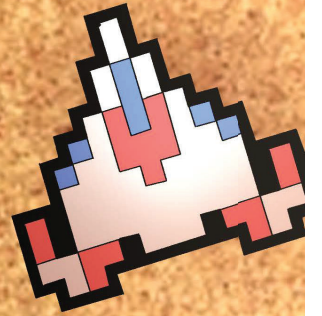


**This zine contains
depictions of food,
guns and fire.**

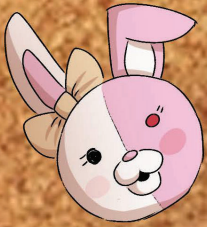
**Spoilers for
Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair ahead !**

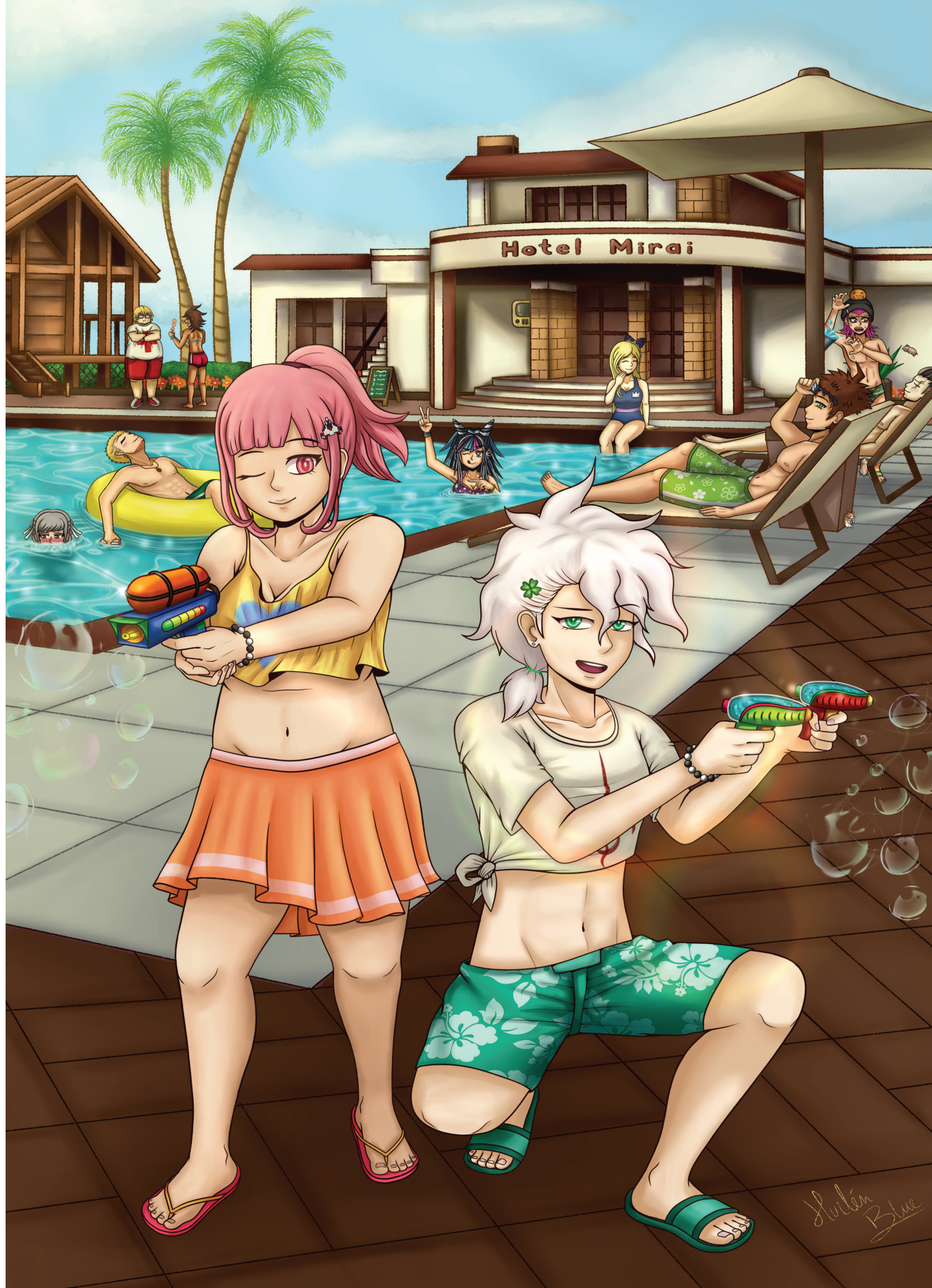






HOPE





Lulân Blue

















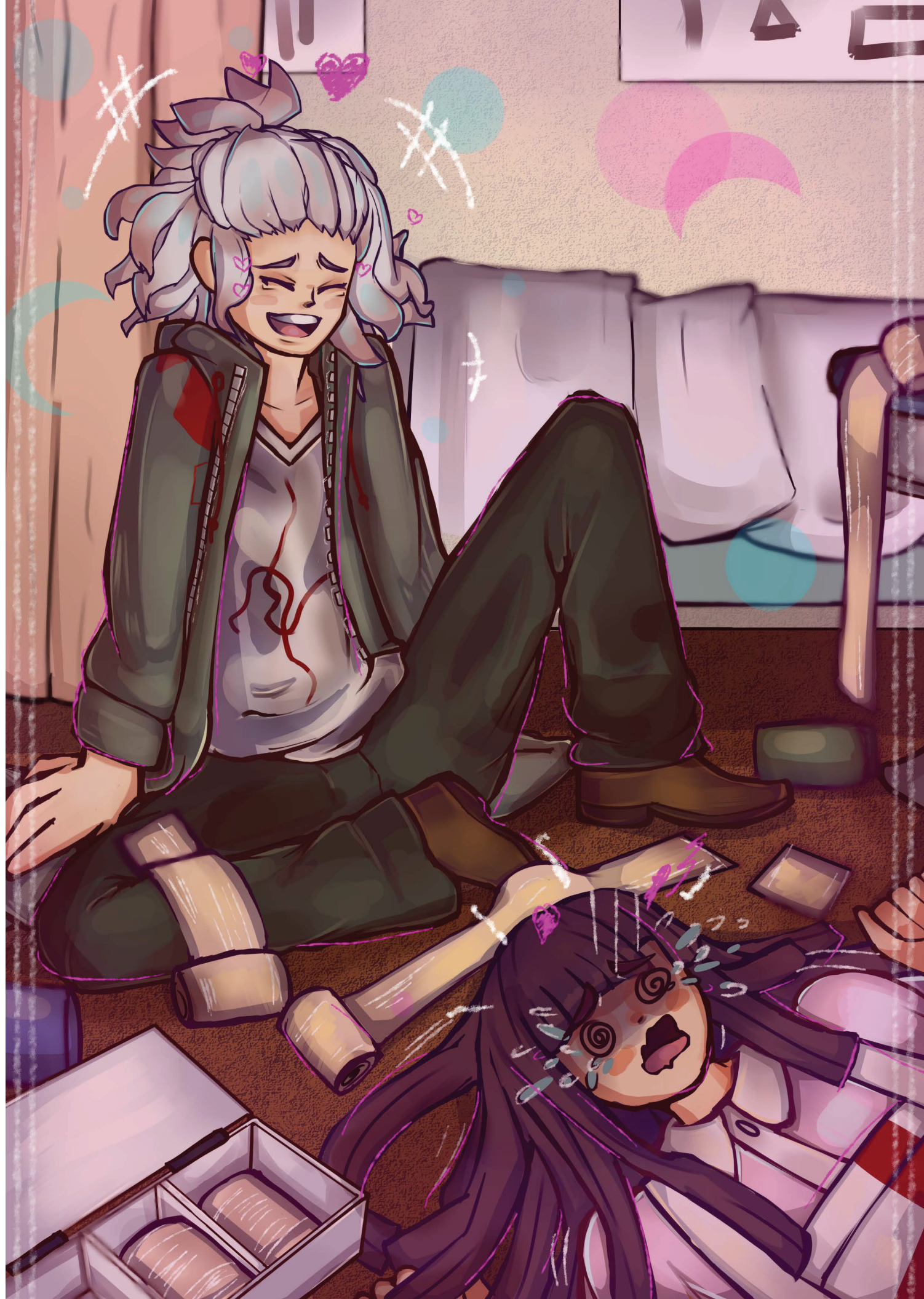
Franukuu



**papercut
acquired!**

**serious
injury**











@Kyeonwa







PHOTO DAY!

KOMAEDA & KOIZUMI!!



ARUTE
2021

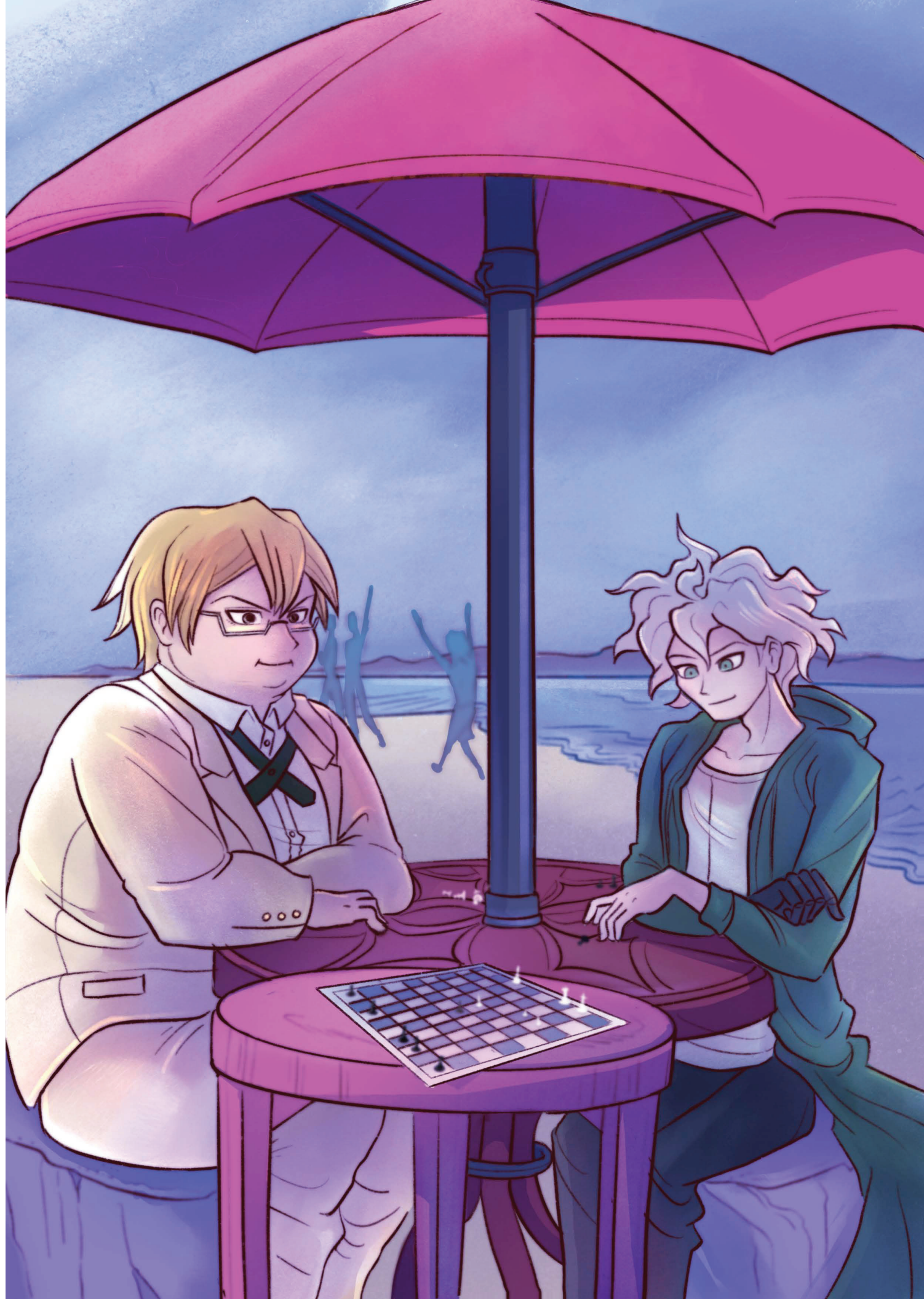






















Bren
Bonniere



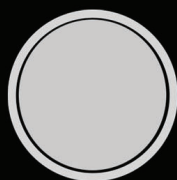












POST STORY REE







Spring Cleaning

A Komaeda + Hinata story by Neon

It's almost comical how much dust can accumulate in a single area, Nagito thought to himself as he wiped at the blinds of the hotel lobby. And really, if he wasn't so afraid that the dust would get into his lungs as he inhaled, he would laugh. Surely something wheezy and unpleasant to listen to, but a laugh nonetheless. He'd been laughing more often, lately, and while it didn't rattle his ribcage and scratch at his throat as it once used to, it still unnerved the others when he did.

Or rather, all of the others except...

"Damn it, not again!"

That time, Nagito did actually laugh.

"That vacuum doesn't seem to like you very much," He said after the laughter subsided.

Hajime looked at him flatly, green and red almost-glaring, though the expression wavered slightly with the upturn of his lips; "It doesn't like anyone. I'm surprised it even works after all this time."

"It's been a while since everyone thoroughly cleaned up the island. Plenty of time for something to break down. I'd imagine the others are just as unlucky."

Hajime didn't say anything in response, marinating the thought in the silence between them. Maybe it was overly poetic, but Nagito enjoyed seeing the metaphorical cogs turning as Hajime figured out a way to respond to him.

One second, two seconds, three se—

"Well, I guess that means we'll have to improvise."

It was still a novelty; Nagito would bring up something about luck, and rather than shooting it down, Hajime would find a way to turn it into something better. Wash, rinse, repeat. And he was getting quicker at it, too. Where it had taken gargantuan amounts of effort (too much, much too much) to untangle Nagito's thoughts before, there now existed a sense of ease.

"You've got that look on your face," Hajime interrupted his internal monologue.

Nagito blinked.

"Which look?"

Hajime glanced away, and folded his arms across his chest. Strangely, he didn't seem tense.

"The look you get when you overthink things."

“Ah, my apologies,” Nagito answered with a small smile.

A pause.

“What was on your mind?” Hajime asked, apparently deeming the question benign enough to ask.

“You,” Nagito answered, relishing the embarrassed and confused sound Hajime barely managed to choke back.

“Uh... what?”

“Things are easier with you, you know,” Nagito said, carefree. “You’ve really got this island under control, after everything that’s happened. It’s fitting, in retrospect. You were always the one to put the pieces together during the tria... *ahem*.” Another pause. “Sorry, I breathed in a bit of dust.”

Hajime looked torn between mentioning that Nagito had completely stopped wiping down the area during their conversation, and letting the conversation drop.

He did neither.

“You know, you don’t give yourself enough credit,” Hajime eventually spoke up. “It’s not just me keeping the island in control. Everyone is doing their part to keep things put together. Yourself included.” At that point, he gestured to the cleaning rag in Nagito’s non-robotic hand. “As much as you think I’d be able to do everything, I’m still just one person.”

“Ah, so you keep me around to be your cleaning maid then?” Nagito said playfully.

(It was fun to see how red Hajime’s face could get when it was just the two of them.)

At that point, the vacuum sputtered back to life, and Nagito decided to give Hajime a brief reprieve. He finished wiping the dust from the blinds, watered the small plants and ficus, and checked behind the reception desk for any stray bugs or rodents. Eventually, the hotel lobby returned to a presentable state, and Nagito allowed himself to flop onto one of the chairs and relax, closing his eyes for the briefest of moments...

“Hey, don’t fall asleep just yet. We’ve still got to clean the upstairs.”

“How long have we been cleaning again, Hajime?” Nagito asked, not bothering to open his eyes.

“...The last five hours, give or take.”

“And have you taken a break in that time?”

“...”

A shuffling sound, then the creak of the chair adjacent to him, and his victory was assured. Nagito lazily opened his eyes, unsurprised to see Hajime mirroring his posture.

“What do you need me to do next?” Nagito asked.

“The restaurant needs to have the windows wiped, the floor swept, and the kitchen cleared. Might need to water the flowers too,” Hajime responded, but didn’t bother to move; “We can take care of that later, though.” A silent beat. “You’ve been working hard today. I’m proud.”

Nagito furrowed his brows; “I don’t mind cleaning, Hajime. It’s just—”

“No, I mean it.” A firm voice to match the firm hand now on his shoulder. “You’ve... you’ve really made a lot of progress. Not just cleaning, but... I mean, in general.”

“In general?” Nagito pressed.

“Yeah. Well, I can tell you’re putting effort into what you’re doing, if that makes sense? Like, you’re getting along with everyone, and you’re taking your health more seriously, you’re actually eating and doing activities, and I know it can’t really be that easy to stay focused with all that’s going on with you, but you’re...” Hajime seemed to struggle for words; “You’re making progress. And, um. That’s really impressive.” He laughed awkwardly for a moment; “Sorry, that sounded lame, didn’t it?”

Nagito looked blankly at Hajime as he processed the words. While it was true that he’d been trying to socialize more often, bits and pieces of conversation here and there (*not enough*), and that he’d been eating more and taking his medication on a regular basis (*not enough*), and that he’d been spending time trying to busy himself as their abnormally normal island life continued (*still not enough*...

...

Or... was it?)

“Nagito?” Hajime waved a hand in front of Nagito’s face, bringing him out of his stupor and back into reality. “You still with me?”

Nagito nodded, and looked ahead.

“Yeah... ah, I mean, yes, I’m still with you.”

Hajime quirked an eyebrow, thoughts divided between curiosity and concern, ever the gentleman.

“Do you want to talk about it?” He asked.

Nagito shook his head; “It’s not important. And I mean that, truly. I just had a realization of sorts.”

“Care to share with the class?” Hajime said, angling for humor, though it landed a bit awkwardly, still charming in a way.

“Mm, maybe later. We should get back to cleaning soon. After all, we need the kitchen cleared so Teruteru can properly make a nice late lunch, right?” And then, without hesitation, “It’s about time for us all to relax.”

Hajime smiled warmly.

It’s not just ‘you’ all anymore. Finally, finally, ‘us’.

Nagito smiled back at him.

“Yeah,” Hajime said, standing up from the chair and stretching his arms above his head as Nagito followed suit, “We should. I can take care of the windows and the floor if you take care of the dishes. That way you won’t inhale any more dust.”

Nagito nodded, and quietly said, “Sounds like a plan,” as they walked up the stairs to the restaurant, side by side.



Gaming Buddies

A Komaeda + Nanami story by Sarah

Gaming Buddies (Platonic Nagito and Chiaki) (Non-Despair AU, After Nagito's suspension.)

It was an early spring morning at Hope's Peak Academy, and the weather was also quite nice. Chiaki Nanami, current student attending as the Ultimate Gamer from the main course Class 77-B, was walking around the courtyard by herself. She rather enjoyed spending time with her classmates, but as of right now, they are off doing their own thing.

Of course finding one Nagito Komaeda, the Ultimate Lucky Student of main course Class 77-B, sitting against a tree by himself wasn't a strange occurrence, but he was still rather seated at an interesting location. Around this time of day, this area of the school was rather empty most days. Finding him alone however, wasn't a strange occurrence at all. There was literally nobody else here besides the two of them, so here was a bit of a strange place to sit, even for him.

Most people in their class found the Lucky Student intolerable. It most likely isn't wrong to say he found *himself* intolerable. She could, of course understand why the others felt that way, he was a strange one. Always talking down on himself, talking about hope, smiling or laughing at the weirdest times and even some questionable actions have landed him on his classmates list of people they should stay away from.

Chiaki was undoubtedly one of the nicer people in the class, so it only makes sense she would be the one to approach him.

"Hey Nagito," she started, "how are you doing?" Her voice was quiet, but she made it loud enough to get his attention. This was followed by him turning his head to face hers.

"Ah.. Chiaki. I'm doing okay, but what are you doing approaching someone as worthless as me?" he looks back down at the ground, a quiet sigh follows.

"I would appreciate it if you'd stop talking that way. And, I'm here because I care about you." she let some form of a smile onto her face. "Mind if I sit?" she asked him.

"Why would anyone care about me..?" he said without hesitation. Chiaki noticed he didn't answer her question, so she took it as a no and sat down anyway.

"Well.. you're still a human being and deserve someone to care. End of story." she asserted and looked into his eyes.

Nagito looked like he was about to say something about that, but refrained from doing so in the end. "Why did you come here?" was his only response.

"I didn't come here intentionally. I was just on a walk and saw you here..." she informs him. She wasn't wrong. She came here randomly on her stroll.

The Lucky Student provided no response. "Anyway... I thought I'd give you some company. Wanna play video games?"

Nagito sighs, "Do I get a choice?"

"Well, I'd say no. You technically do have a choice, but if you say no, I'll refuse to leave you alone." she teased slightly, otherwise sounding serious.

"Fine.. but.. I have to eat lunch right now, and I don't want someone as talented as you around trash like me while I eat.."

"Doesn't matter." She passes him a gaming console. "I do too." she pulls out the bento box she kept in her backpack. "We can eat together, ya know."

Nagito was silent for some time and eventually broke a somewhat uneasy silence with, "...Fine. Though if I am a bother to you at any time, I am more than happy to leave you alone, I don't want to annoy you."

Chiaki laughed lightly, "Now, if you were a bother to me, I wouldn't have even approached you, would I? Anyway... let's play, you are lucky I even decided to approach you."

Nagito seemed to smile, if a very small smile, at being called lucky. Probably because he is the Ultimate Lucky Student, but even then, he has both taken strange pride in his luck and trusts it more than anything, but simultaneously refuses to accept luck as an actual talent. He puts the talented people on a pedestal, but despite having an official ultimate, he thinks of himself as below the other talented students. Though, Chiaki does wonder what he would think about her friend Hajime from the reserve course, a group of students who attend through a tuition fee and do not have a talent. Chiaki's guess is as good as any. She probably won't ever understand how his mind works though.

Nagito grabbed the console reluctantly and took out a simple sandwich from his bag that he had laid against the side of the tree he was leaning on. "What are we playing and how do you play it..?"

"Hm... well... we can play Mario Kart. It's a simple game and almost everyone knows how to play it." Chiaki thought for a moment.

"Trash such as myself has no reason to deny a suggestion from someone as talented as you..." Nagito seemed to temporarily trail off.

"Stop calling yourself trash.. You are a human, just like everyone else." Chiaki said in a commanding tone, but her demeanor didn't make it sound serious.

Again, Nagito provided no response. So... they began a 'Grand Prix' of Mario Kart 8...

Chiaki is an experienced and talented gamer.. She typically does give it her full attention, though it wasn't necessary right now.. So, whilst playing with Nagito, her thoughts started to wander. She wanted to know more about him. *Like... did he ever get lonely being isolated this much..? Or... what was life like for him, did he ever have someone to call a proper friend? Where did his hope philosophy come from..? Why does he seem to hate himself so much..? Why is he just such a strange person in general..?*

It flooded her brain. In lieu of that she quickly refocused on her game. Nagito had won the first race but Chiaki was the clear victor of the second and third races. Now that Nagito had a chance to draw with her in the final race, she had no choice but to focus.

Eventually, Chiaki won the race... "I win." she said, nonchalantly. Nagito laughed at her quick declaration of victory.

"I didn't expect anything less of the great Ultimate Gamer. I never stood a chance against your talent..." he rambled for a bit.

"I figured you'd be a good challenger. You have Ultimate Luck after all..." she said, as if Nagito had forgotten his own talent in the process. *Even my friend Hajime isn't as good as you, and he's been practicing with me for a while.* She kept that thought completely to herself.

"Luck isn't a talent. Even so, the luck I have doesn't exist without either a risk or consequence..." he explained. This left Chiaki confused. Not only did his own beliefs contradict that sentence a bit (to her understanding at least), but the idea of his luck working like that was... interesting to say the least.

She decided not to question it for now... Though after this portion of her experiences with Nagito Komaeda, she decided she wanted to know more about him. She decided to spend more time with him and be the one that finally gets to know him for who he is...



Routine Maintenance

A Komaeda + Souda story by Bit

Kazuichi always feels his most productive in the magic hours between midnight and sunrise.

He isn't sure what it is, but just those few fleeting hours, the knowledge that he's well and truly alone with his thoughts, always help to center him.

Even if he doesn't have a huge project in the works, it's always nice to have those few hours just to tinker. Not to mention that, when inspiration does finally take hold, it gives him the chance to magically produce something overnight.

Everyone's asleep, at least for the moment. He's sure Akane and Nekomaru will be up soon to stretch. They've been on a morning aerobics kick lately, so they've become his alarm clock, in a way. It's not like he can't get any work done with them around. Too much noise throws off his concentration, so when they say their good mornings, he packs up his stuff and bids them a goodnight.

That being said, Kazuichi almost jumps out of his skin when a familiar voice greets him.

"Ah, Kazuichi, I was hoping to find you." Nagito joins him on the main deck, smiling as if it isn't totally bizarre for either of them to be up before dawn. "What an amazing run of good luck!"

Kazuichi sits bolt upright, instinctively jerking his head in the direction of the horizon line. And yep, just as expected, the sun still hasn't risen. "What are you doing here?"

Nagito shrugs. "Insomnia. I had such an awful series of nightmares that I simply couldn't get back to sleep. But how fortunate to find you up as well!"

"Yeah, sure." Kazuichi shifts in his spot, trying not to look visibly uncomfortable. Nagito has always been a weird spot for him. On one hand, everything's in the past, and they're all working to move past the awful things they've done, but on the other hand, it's a lot of betrayal for him to get past.

Not that awkwardness would ever stop Nagito. "Though I suppose it's even more fortunate to find you in the throes of creation." He takes a curious step forward. "What is it you're working on?"

“Eh, nothing really.” Kazuichi vaguely gestures to the wooden crate beside him. It’s got the parts for his newest project. Whatever that may be, he’s still not sure, so for the moment he’s just staring into space and trying to think of a good starting point. After all, the best projects are made in far more than one draft. “What’s up?”

With a small chuckle, Nagito pulls back his left sleeve, revealing his mechanical prosthetic. “Unfortunately, it seems my arm has been suffering some malfunctions.”

He holds up his arm, and the fingers randomly twitch as if to prove his point.

Kazuichi gives a low whistle. “That can’t be good. Take a seat and I’ll have a look.”

“Are you sure? I can come back at another time if you’re busy. I wouldn’t want to get in the way of any Ultimate projects.”

“Don’t worry about it.” He had an hour or so at best until Akane and Nekomaru were up and still no ideas to speak of. He’d been considering packing up early and just going to bed anyway. It wouldn’t be a big deal to check out Nagito’s arm first.

But still Nagito doesn’t move. If Kazuichi didn’t know better, he’d say Nagito almost looked hesitant. “Honestly, if it’s too much trouble, I wouldn’t want to bother you, especially considering how late it is.”

“Dude, you’re already here and it’ll probably take a few minutes at most.” Kazuichi indicates the wooden crate with his socket wrench, speaking with much more authority than he felt he had. “Sit.”

Nagito chuckles. “If you say so.” He shrugs off his jacket, hanging it over the crate before sitting down.

Kazuichi furrows his brow. Being all sunshine and giggles would be one thing, but there’s something distinctly *off* about the sunshine and giggles. Call him crazy, but it makes Kazuichi think something might be wrong.

Not to brag or anything, but Nagito’s arm is one of his finest inventions. Completely waterproof, shock resistant, and even equipped to store snacks. Kazuichi is fairly sure Nagito has never used that last function once, but that didn’t stop Kazuichi from bragging that it was there anyway.

All it takes is a cursory glance to see the finer points of damage. On the wrist and elbow especially, it looks like Nagito's arm had hit something. Hard.

"A couple of the circuits are fried." Kazuichi frowns, taking Nagito's hand in his own to get a better look. "Looks like it might have been impact damage. What, did Nekomaru body slam you again?"

Nagito laughs. "No, I learned my lesson the first time."

While he's smiling, Kazuichi is more than familiar with that look. Nagito is being purposefully vague, for whatever reason, and if he talks about what's bothering him, it'll be because Kazuichi coaxed it out of him.

"Well, I'm pretty sure I can fix it no problem. Shouldn't take more than fixing a couple wires and maybe adding something to absorb the shock next time."

Since he has his toolkit with him, it's not like he has to go fetch anything, so he gets started. Like he said, it's no problem. Hardly ten minutes of work. The only thing he's going to have to hold off on is finding a place to add in shock absorbers. He'll have to start brainstorming tomorrow. After he gets some shut eye.

"There." Kazuichi says, twisting in a loose screw. Nagito's prosthetic fingers go still all at once. "That should at least keep it from twitching, but don't do... whatever you did to get it like this again if you can help it."

Nagito takes his hand from Kazuichi's lap, flexing his robotic fingers to test the dexterity. "Wow, Kazuichi! Your Ultimate talent is truly a wonder to behold."

Kazuichi's face burns. Always good to know when someone's happy with his work, but does Nagito always have to be so over the top about it? He's the only person who's ever called Kazuichi's ability to fix stuff "a wonder," but at the same time, he's probably the only person that would mean it. "Uh, thanks."

Nagito's smile fades, his eyes softening with apology. "Ah, it seems I've made you uncomfortable."

"It's just... I don't get complimented much, I guess. It's mostly a thankless job. People don't really notice when things work, only when they're broken." Kazuichi averts his

eyes. It's not like he *wants* to complain, but it is something that sticks in the back of his mind.

Nagito nods his understanding. "I understand that. It's like when people only notice their bad luck and not their good luck, or vice versa."

"Huh. I think that might be the first normal thing you've said in a while."

Nagito furrows his brow, both looks genuinely surprised and genuinely confused. "What do you mean?"

"It just feels like even now, you pull back a bit. You're always on about hope and Ultimates, but we're all just people, dude. Friends, even."

"I could very easily say the same for you, Kazuichi. After all, it takes two to have a conversation before the sun's even risen."

"It's just easier for me to work when it's quiet," Kazuichi says, but he can't keep the note of defensiveness from creeping into his tone. "Plus, I like to watch the sunrise."

"It seems like my bad dreams woke me up just in time then." Nagito turns so he's facing forward, leaning forward like he's about to watch a firework show. "What a fortunate coincidence!"

It doesn't go over Kazuichi's head that Nagito deliberately changed the subject. But it's not like he wanted to talk about his personal issues so candidly either.

He knows what his problems are. He rejects people before they can reject him, he doesn't trust easy, blah blah blah. It's nothing he hasn't known for years, and nothing he wants to review.

So instead he pulls his own makeshift chair a little closer, sidling up beside Nagito so they can watch the sunrise side by side.

It's only a few minutes before the sun peeks over the horizon, painting the ocean in glistening shades of pink and orange, colors that rolled with the waves.

If Kazuichi's being honest, this is his favorite time of the night. Even if his inspiration is low and it feels like nothing's going right, he'll always try to stay up to watch the sunrise. Sunrises are beautiful, they happen every day, and

yet few people are ever around to watch. It was kind of sad, really.

The sky transformed in a matter of hours, and no one was awake to appreciate it.

“How inspiring!” Nagito pipes up. “Have you ever seen a finer symbol of hope?”

Kazuichi rolls his eyes. His fault for expecting a normal moment. Always with the hope. “It’s just the sunrise, dude.”

“It’s hard to find such pure beauty in the world!” Nagito turns, as if remembering who he’s talking to, and Kazuichi could almost swear his smile turned teasing. “Aside from Miss Sonia, of course.”

Kazuichi’s face burns just thinking about her. Sometimes he wishes she’d wander out here in the middle of the night too, but it never happens. He wonders what Nagito would say about that kind of hope, the non-inspiring daydreaming he specialized in.

Kazuichi scratches at the back of his neck, keeping his eyes on the horizon. Clouds canvas the horizon this morning, so the sunlight colors them murky violet on one side and cotton candy pink around the edges. “I know she and Gundham have been together for a while now but... do you think I have a chance with Miss Sonia?”

Nagito puts a hand to his cheek and sighs. “Ah, the beauty of hope, even in its futility.”

“H-hey! Why’d you say it like that?”

“No reason.”

“Hey, have a little faith in me!” Kazuichi grumbles. He knows most people think his chances with Miss Sonia are nonexistent, but he wishes his classmates would at least have *some* faith in him!

Kazuichi returns his gaze to the sunrise. The sun is high enough now that it’s casting brilliant rays in every direction. The growing expanse of pink and orange continually pushes at the blues and purples of the night sky, until they’re so far away Kazuichi can no longer see them overhead.

“Oh, and Nagito?”

Nagito turns his head, and in that moment, Kazuichi sees the sparks of vulnerability he tries so hard to hide. For a second, he's *wary*.

It's like he knows he's been found out.

"If you wanted to hang out for a bit, you could've just asked. No need to bust up your arm."

But Nagito just smiles, like Kazuichi is spouting nonsense and the last thing he'd do is create a situation that necessitates him to spend time with an Ultimate he feels is so far above him. "I'm sorry, I think you're mistaken. This was an accident."

"Right." Kazuichi leans back, rubbing at the back of his neck. "Well, if you wanna avoid an accident in the future, you know where to find me. A little routine maintenance never hurt anything."

Nagito's smile doesn't change. Instead, it's more like the light around him shifts. Like a new cloud drifted into his personal sunrise, the darkness of its shadows making him look that much brighter in contrast.

"I think I will."

The background is a soft watercolor illustration. It features a red bridge with white railings spanning across a body of water. The sky above is filled with light, wispy clouds in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The water below the bridge is depicted with various shades of blue and green, showing some texture and reflection. The overall style is artistic and serene.

Check Up

A Komaeda + Tsumiki story by Ally

Just like every weekday, time passed by very slowly, but also very quickly. And just like every weekday, upon turning in yet another assignment via Google Classroom, Nagito was ready to turn in for the day. Sure, it was only the afternoon (and the early afternoon at that), but it was part of his routine by now, with his routine going along the lines of this: Wake up by nine in the morning, join a few Zoom calls, complete and submit some annoying assignments, wrap it all up by around two in the afternoon, and take a well-deserved, lengthy nap right afterwards. By now, it was automatic to commit to this routine five days out of the seven. And unfortunately, that was practically the routine for everyone else who was enrolled in Hope's Peak Academy (as well as other neighboring schools), as the current pandemic was only worsening each and every day. For some, resorting to online was an odd blessing, but just like Nagito, he and many others felt that it was a never ending curse.

But it wasn't *all* that bad. At the very least, Nagito's bad luck rarely got in the way, and he had more free time. Though, if you were to ask him what he did during his free time, his answer would either be reading, napping, or falling asleep while reading. Still, even with the decreasing chances in his bad luck and the increase in his free time, his compromised immune system made things more difficult than what he cared for. Of course, with this in mind, like anyone else with a compromised immune system, he tries to stay inside as much as possible. But alas, *someone's* got to stock up on groceries and other necessities, and considering he lives by himself in an upper-middle class apartment as of now, that particular someone is none other than him.

Thankfully, he's not *entirely* alone. Despite getting ready to shut his school-provided Chromebook off for the day, deep down, he knew what was about to happen, mostly considering that today was Friday. As soon as the laptop's clock changed to 2:11 *p.m.*, a notification popped up on his screen, telling him that he was being invited to a Zoom call. He softly smiled and

accepted the invitation, waiting for the host to allow him into the call. It only took a few seconds for him to see the other person on his screen.

“G-Good afternoon, N-Nagito,” Mikan said. Her long, choppy, dark purple hair was pulled back into a high ponytail, and considering she was in the comfort of her home, she had also resorted to wearing more casual, comfy clothing. A pastel purple, baggy hoodie swallowed her thin frame, with her matching, baggy sweatpants doing the same with her bandaged legs. On the front of her hoodie, a small transgender pride heart and a small bisexual pride heart had been visibly sewn on. One would mistake that the Zoom call was glitching, but her stutter was genuine and well-known by Nagito and their other classmates. “H-How are you?”

“Well, I’m still here, aren’t I?” Nagito said, chuckling as an attempt to make light of his rather odd response.

“You are, an-and I’m glad that you’re still here! I really am, and I can say the same for everyone else. A-Anyway, are you ready for your usual questionnaire?”

“Ready whenever you are, Mikan.”

“Gr-Great! Ah, I’ll go ahead and start with your academic progress,” Despite having done this so many times, Mikan still pulled out a clipboard with the printed sets of questions, and cleared her throat before beginning. “H-Have you been attending all of your scheduled Zoom calls throughout this week?”

“Yup.” Nagito nodded.

“How are your grades overall? H-Have you been struggling with any of your classes?”

“They’re about as good as they’ll get. I’ve been doing just about average in all of my classes.”

“Th-That’s great! I’m proud of you for keeping up the good work. I-I acknowledge how hard it can be during times like now, so I’m glad to hear that you’ve been performing w-well. Do you have any further questions or concerns revolving around your grades, classes, teachers, or anything else academic-related?”

Nagito shook his head. “Not really.”

“Excellent! L-Let’s move on to your physical health then,” Mikan flipped a page up, and began to read the next set of questions. “H-Have you been following all of the protocols set in place? Only going out when necessary, we-wearing a facemask when you *are* out, washing your hands and using hand sanitizer, and taking those vitamin C gummies that I recommended to you before s-school got shut down? H-Have you experienced any of the following symptoms: Coughing--”

“I’m gonna have to say yes to all of those protocol questions, and no to all of those symptom questions, Nurse Mikan. My health’s been stable so far.” Nagito said, holding back a yawn. The questions were just so automatic and repetitive; even hearing an Ultimate read them aloud was almost white noise to him. But he reminded himself that once it was over, he could take a nap.

“G-Good! That’s a relief to know. Ah, I know I’ve asked this before, but I must ask again: H-Have you been taking your chest binder off after wearing it for eight to ten hours?”

“Actually, I have! Hard to believe that trash like myself can stop to see the importance of taking it off and not let my self-loathing get in the way, huh?”

“Heheh, I’m really h-happy to hear all of that, Nagito! But I must remind you once again th-that you are *not* trash! Y-You’re a good person, even if you personally think o-or believe otherwise. I-I guess we’ll go ahead and move on to your mental and emotional health then,”

Mikan shyly said, softly smiling before resuming. “L-Let’s see here... h-have you been taking your antidepressants as prescribed?”

Nagito faintly hummed, internally debating on if he should try to lie his way out of the question, or if he should just spill the beans and tell the timid girl the truth.

“N-Nagito?”

“I’ve been taking them... I guess.” Nagito slowly answered, stretching his words out cautiously.

“Wh-What do you mean ‘I guess’?”

“Sometimes, I take them as soon as I wake up in the morning, and sometimes, I don’t take them at all.”

“N-Nagito, th-that’s no good at all! Th-Those are prescribed to you for a reason, a-and they’re important for your well-being! I-I understand that times have been really rough lately, b-but that’s still n-no excuse to skip out on taking them! Wh-Why do you sometimes n-not take them?”

“Because sometimes, I feel as though they’re completely useless,” Nagito flatly admitted. “It’s not like my *parents* or anyone else cares if I take them or not.”

“Th-That’s not true! That’s not true at all! I-If Hajime, Chiaki, and Makoto were in this Zoom call right now, then they’d agree with me. E-Even Kokichi would agree with me, a-and everyone knows how he is! Me, them, and others care about y-your personal well-being, and we specifically care about whether you’re taking your antidepressants or not. Wh-While I can understand why you feel that way, i-it’s still not true. I understand that it’s not that swell when antidepressants don’t fix everything right up i-in an instant, b-but they still have a purpose, and th-that purpose is to rebalance the chemistry in your brain that affects mood and emotions.”

“Is there a way for you to put that in non-medical, more basic terms? No offense to an Ultimate like yourself.”

Mikan sheepishly giggled. “N-None taken. Th-The basic purpose of taking antidepressants is to help you feel and function better. A-And I mean this in the best way possible: I can o-one-hundred percent say that the antidepressants you’ve been prescribed *do* help, and continue to do so. Wh-When you haven’t taken your antidepressants, I can just see it in your eyes. I can sense it, a-and knowing that you hadn’t taken them makes me really sad. Not mad, not disappointed; j-just sad.”

“Why?”

“B-Because I hate seeing a... because I hate seeing a f-friend of mine struggle like that. I-It makes me upset, and it causes m-me to worry, too. I care about you as both a patient *and* a good friend, s-so please, take your antidepressants every day like you’re supposed to, o-okay? Pl-Please?” Mikan said, instinctively flinching and closing her eyes, expecting a negative response despite knowing that the white-haired boy had and would never lash out at her.

Nagito hummed some more, constructing his response and abruptly coming up blank every time. So after what felt like hours spent sitting in silence, he finished humming his made-up tune and sighed out a response: “As expected from the Ultimate Nurse! I... appreciate it. I’ll try my best to abide by your words, Mikan. I swear.”

“R-Really?” Mikan opened her eyes, somewhat surprised to earn such an accepting response. She giggled and softly smiled again, fidgeting with a few strands of her choppy hair. “Thank you, Nagito. Th-That makes me even *happier* to hear you say that,” She set aside her clipboard. “I-I guess that concludes the questionnaire for this week then. D-Do you have any further questions, concerns, o-or comments before this c-call ends?”

“Actually, I have something to say before you go,” Nagito paused, causing Mikan to instinctively close her eyes again. He hummed a low tune for a moment, before resuming.

“Thank you.”

“F-For what?”

“For always being there for me, and... and for always being such a good friend. I’m glad to have you by my side, especially through such despairing times like right now. You are like a pillar of bright hope, and I couldn’t be more grateful. Thank you so much, Mikan.”

“... H-Huh? N-Nagito, this is unlike you... n-not that there’s a problem with that!” Mikan said, touched by Nagito’s warm kindness. “S-Sorry! I just don’t know what to say; I-I’m not used to hearing something li-like that. Th-Thank you for saying such nice things.”

“It’s not a problem at all! It’s not every day that someone as kind as you checks up on li’l ol’ me. I’m glad that I have someone I can go to, but I want you to know that you can always come to me for anything, too.”

“I-I can?”

“That’s what friends do, right? They stay by each other’s sides?”

“Y-Yeah... yeah, that’s what friends do. Th-Thank you. Ah, I guess I should get going now. Take care of yourself, and remember to stay hydrated and safe, o-okay?”

“I will. You do the same. I’ll see you next Friday.”

“Okay. S-See you later, N-Nagito!”

Nagito pressed the ‘End’ button and then the ‘Leave Meeting’ button, ending the Zoom call. He closed his laptop, before setting it on his nightstand and plugging it back in, leaving it to charge. Opening the drawer to his nightstand, he took out his prescription bottle full of antidepressants; all in the form of oval-shaped purple tablets. He grabbed the water bottle that he

always kept on his nightstand throughout the day, and proceeded to take his daily dose of antidepressants with a swish of room temperature water, exhaling after swallowing.

It wasn't until he got up and passed by a hanging, circular mirror that he noticed something. Within his reflection was that smile from earlier; it was still there. And seeing it in that reflection only caused that smile to widen. As most people say: It's the little things that count.

“... Thank you again, Mikan Tsumiki. Thank you for always checking in on me.”



Sugardrop

A Komaeda + Kuzuryu story by Mamichigo

Title: sugardrop

Nagito winced to himself when he felt the afternoon Sun burning at the skin of his neck. He scooted his chair closer to the round table, grateful that at least this one had a parasol over it, so at least he could take refuge from the light. Though, looking at the others, they didn't seem at all as concerned as Nagito is about the Sun, all too happy to bask in it while loudly conversing with each other. It would make sense, then, that they weren't particularly drawn to his shadowy, slightly distanced table.

Nagito raised his teacup, but after a thoughtful pause, he set it back down without tasting it. He smiled a bit.

As long as everyone else was happy.

"The hell are you doing looking all damn gloomy in the corner?" Kuzuryuu spoke in his usual brusque speech. Komaeda blinked at him as Kuzuryuu invited himself to one of the empty chairs, unceremoniously dropping down onto it.

"I'm not doing anything in particular," Nagito replied with ease. He gestured to his still full teacup. "Just enjoying my tea. It is a tea party, I'm sure that's mostly the point."

"The *point* is to get along with everyone and talk about whatever shit comes to mind. Or something like that." Kuzuryuu narrowed his eyes at him. "I thought this would be your kind of thing."

Nagito was quick to raise his hands defensively. "It is! I enjoy watching everyone.... Talk about whatever shit comes to mind, was it?"

Kuzuryuu clicked his tongue and dragged his chair over just to shove Nagito by knocking their shoulders together. It barely hurt, so it wasn't really a violent action, and the thought of it made Nagito chuckle in response while rubbing his shoulder for show.

"That was unnecessary, Kuzuryuu-kun," Nagito admonished, in the same tone he would use on an unruly child. If Kuzuryuu noticed it, he chose to let it go with only a roll of his eyes.

"Yeah, you cheeky bastard, don't try your usual funny business to make me change the topic."

Nagito felt himself twitch, but quickly hid it behind a clueless smile that was entirely staged. He could almost feel Kuzuryuu's rage just looking at it.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"You're so fucking exhausting, did you know that?"

"I've been told."

Kuzuryuu finally sighed and slumped back on his chair, his head slightly tilted back to look up at the sky. Nagito watched him for a moment, as well as the way he was squinting.

"That's not good for your eyes," Nagito murmured.

He reached for the brim of the extravagant hat Kuzuryuu wore and hesitated for a moment, but Nagito shook his head and finally touched the hat. However, as soon as his fingers reached their destination, his hand was quickly knocked away.

"Quit mother-henning," Kuzuryuu grumbled. He looked at Nagito, then, after a beat, tipped his hat so it cast a shadow over his eyes.

Nagito, satisfied, nodded in approval.

"If I may ask, Kuzuryuu-kun—"

"The fuck are you being so formal for?"

"If I may ask," Nagito continued, "what are *you* doing here? On this particular table, I mean. It's not an ideal spot for keeping conversation with anyone, really."

"If you realize that, at least pretend to have an excuse to be here yourself, bastard," Kuzuryuu complained. Nagito remained unaffected, simply cocking his head and waiting. "You can be goddamn insistent when you want to, and I don't feel like going through that. I got tired from all the noise. There, happy?"

"Oh, you too?" Nagito said without thinking.

Kuzuryuu sat up on his seat, and Nagito quickly covered his mouth, just in case something else slipped out without his permission.

"Is that what the lone act is about? You could've just said that."

"It'd be... rude of me to complain over something so small when everyone is having a good time. It's really fine. Honestly."

To his surprise, Kuzuryuu snorted rather inelegantly, and when Nagito raised his head, it was to be greeted by a flick to the forehead.

"Ow!"

"Idiot, you sound like you're desperately trying to convince yourself. I know you're smart, so don't act dumb on me now." Kuzuryuu somehow managed to stare down at him as Nagito clutched at his own forehead. "Why the fuck can't you complain? Lemme say it for you, this group can't be a hell of a fucking lot, they're loud and all over the place and don't know how to control themselves."

"Wouldn't that include you as well—"

"*Meaning*, it can be tiring, so it's not like you're in the wrong anyways. Doesn't mean you shouldn't get to have a good time as well."

"I suppose."

"You *better*."

Nagito wasn't so sure, but hearing the forceful way Kuzuryuu spoke, it put a genuine smile on his face all the same. He was just telling Nagito about how their group had too much energy between them, but Kuzuryuu himself always approached every situation with characteristic intensity. It had a sort of unique charm to it, and it helped Nagito focus on something other than the heat and the wall of noise all around him.

"Kuzuryuu-kun?"

"What?"

Would Kuzuryuu appreciate being thanked? Probably not. He'd make a fuss about it, deny his bad intentions and even maybe leave in a huff. Nothing out of the usual, but Nagito wasn't in the mood to deal with the ruckus.

Moreover, he appreciated the company, and he'd like to keep it for as long as Kuzuryuu's patience lasted without Nagito egging him on.

"It's nothing," Nagito said.

Kuzuryuu leveled him with a skeptical stare. "The fact that you said that just makes it more suspicious."

"Being suspicious all the time is bad for your health, Kuzuryuu-kun. Here," Nagito gently slid over an untouched piece of cake to Kuzuryuu, "you should eat some, since you're here."

"Isn't that yours?"

"Nope."

Kuzuryuu still didn't touch the cake. In fact, he was looking down at it as if it was about to explode in thirty seconds and he had no idea how to disarm it without killing them all in the process.

"Hinata goes on forever when you don't eat and it's fucking annoying, I'm not taking your food," Kuzuryuu huffed.

Nagito glanced back to the center of the garden, where Hinata was laughing at something Mioda was telling him. As if sensing his stare, Hinata looked up, surprised to find Nagito already looking at him. They exchanged a quick and somewhat awkward wave.

"It's fine, it's not like he'll know," Nagito insisted.

"You're underestimating that guy's Komaeda sense. It's weird as fuck."

Nagito raised an eyebrow. "I don't think that's a thing."

"It absolutely fucking is and you know it, you bastard. Not taking your goddamn food."

Kuzuryuu attempted to slide the plate back to his side, but Nagito stopped it with two fingers pressed to the pretty porcelain. Kuzuryuu scowled at him.

"Hey, dumbass—"

"I don't like it."

"Huh?"

"I don't like the cake, you can keep it."

Kuzuryuu blinked, appearing to be bewildered. Still cautious, he paused to take a small bite of it. He frowned as he swallowed.

"I mean, this tastes fine. That bastard Hanamura does know his stuff when it comes to food." Kuzuryuu raised his eyebrows. "So? You telling me what's up with it? You better not be getting sick without saying anything, otherwise I'll throttle you myself."

Nagito chuckled. "I'd rather you didn't. And there's nothing wrong with it, Hanamura-kun's skills are as amazing as always, there's no doubt about that."

"Yeah, yeah. So?"

"Well, I don't like sweet things."

Kuzuryuu gaped. The utter shock in his expression was quite funny, but Nagito did his best to hide his humor behind a small cough.

"There's no fucking way, I've seen you eat them before!"

"When they were offered to me, yes."

It took a moment for that sink in. Kuzuryuu was starting to look pretty heated about the whole ordeal. "Fucking *hell* Komaeda. Just say no! Do you have goddamn tennis balls inside your skull instead of a brain?!"

"There's no need to destroy someone's good mood when they went out of their way to get me something, even if I don't like it," Nagito reasoned. "And I don't eat it unless I absolutely have to."

"So like when Hanamura asks you to taste test whatever sweets he is making, and you just take it?"

Nagito beamed. "Precisely!"

"You're goddamn stupid, is what you are, now give me that cake," Kuzuryuu demanded. The first bite he took of the cake managed to look angry and intimidating, even when Kuzuryuu's left cheek became round as it was stuffed with too much food.

"It's really not a big deal," Nagito promised.

"Shut up," Kuzuryuu mumbled, so Nagito fell silent. Kuzuryuu chewed while contemplating on something. When he was done, he slapped a hand on the table. "It's decided."

"What is?"

"If something is too sweet, you can just give it to me. I don't have a problem with them, so it should be fine."

"Kuzuryuu-kun..."

"What?"

"You just want an excuse to eat sweets, don't you?"

"Shut up!" Kuzuryuu pressed his knuckles to the top of Nagito's head. "I'm being fucking nice to you, so you should just take it and be grateful, you little shit!"

"I am, I am, really!" Nagito agreed, caught between laughing and wincing. "You're gonna pull all my hair out at this rate, have some mercy..."

Kuzuryuu continued to rub his scalp for a second more, then he let up and settled back imperiously on his chair. He pointed a finger at Nagito.

"Let that be your lesson," Kuzuryuu said with a sneer.

"Of course."

Nagito glanced between Kuzuryuu and his surely cold tea, an innocent smile on his face.

"Will you really eat them for me?"

"I did say it, so of course I will. I'm not the kind to go back on my word."

"Hmm, yeah, you aren't." Nagito tapped his finger thoughtfully. "Then, would you take this? I'm not very good with the amount of sugar in it."

He gestured to the tea, and understanding appeared in Kuzuryuu's expression. "Is that why you've just been playing with it instead of drinking? Tch, give me that."

Nagito got out of the way when Kuzuryuu quickly snatched the teacup before Nagito could offer it to him. Without missing a beat, Kuzuryuu took a hearty gulp of it, and Nagito got to watch as his face filled with horror and he choked as the taste settled on his mouth.

"*Holy shit.*"

"I know."

"Fucking goddammit, what in the hell?"

"Yup."

"Why is there so much sugar in this?!"

Nagito couldn't help himself; this time, he laughed out loud. He tried his best to convey he was apologetic about it, but seeing Kuzuryuu stick his tongue as far out as it would go while scowling sent him into hysterics again, and any words got mangled beyond recognition.

"You're such a little shit," Kuzuryuu grumbled.

"I-I'm sorry... That really was my bad," Nagito said in one breath, struggling to keep the air in his lungs in the aftermath of his laughing fit. "Saionji-san gave me that. I'm pretty sure she thought she was being helpful."

"That was *shit*. But," Kuzuryuu eyed him, finally getting over the taste of the tea enough to relax his face muscles. "Apparently you do have some guts in you to pull a prank like that."

"I truly am sorry, I won't do something like that again. I took advantage of your good will—"

"Shut the fuck up." Kuzuryuu held the teacup up to his lips, tipped his head back and drank all of the tea in one single gulp. "It's fine."

Kuzuryuu sounded like even saying that much through all the sugar was a struggle, but Nagito didn't call him out on it. He was distracted by that show of will, of the unusual way to make a promise. There was no other way around it, Nagito was flattered, so much he couldn't find anything to say back.

"...You're really the dependable sort, I admire that about you."

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever," Kuzuryuu mumbled, face going red.

Nagito almost wanted to tease him a little more, but he kept that thought to himself.

"Well, you seem like you're in a better mood," Kuzuryuu noted. "You up for walking around a bit? C'mon."

Nagito thought about it, but it wasn't a hard decision to make. "Sure, it'd be good to talk to everyone a little."

Kuzuryuu smirked at him. It looked strangely like a look of pride. "That's the spirit."

Nagito waited for Kuzuryuu to finish the cake, then he got up, closely followed by Kuzuryuu. He folded his hands behind his back and cocked his head.

"I just wanted to say it this once, since I doubt you'll let me do it again," Nagito started. "Thank you."

Kuzuryuu sighed and put a hand on his hip. "Then, I'll say it just this once too. You're welcome, you bastard."

"I think I could've done without the bastard at the end..."

"Don't go getting picky on me now."

Kuzuryuu knocked him off balance, and Nagito carefully, gently, did the same back.



Cut, Sprouted, Reborn

A Komaeda + Kuzuryu story by Magi

“Kamukura-kun, Kamukura-kun, Kamukura-kun.”

It's funny, he couldn't help but think. How Kamukura Izuru looks when sleeping.

“Kamukura-kun, Kamukura-kun,” he chants, poking at the other's forehead. “It's not like you to sleep so much. Have you been getting overworked? Have you finally reached your limit?”

He's half-joking, even as he does wonder. *Is it possible for a superhuman to have limits? Well, Kamukura-kun is a human **experiment**.*

Kamukura's breathing was regular like a human, but when his eyes fluttered open, they were that unnatural mixture of hazel and red. Komaeda regards him kindly all the same.

“Good morning,” he chirped, contrasted against a bright sky above, sunlight filtered through the leaves and branches. “I was almost worried you wouldn't get up.”

“Boring,” Kamukura drones, impassive and cold as ever. “That would be such a worthless end.”

“It would,” Komaeda agreed happily. “Especially after coming all this way. I don't mind leaving you to find peace in your existence, but you are supposed to be my escort.”

Kamukura doesn't look at him, gaze still locked in front. Komaeda's not really surprised he wasn't deemed worth even the slightest bit of movement. It's still slightly exasperating after all that's happened.

Kamukura-kun's so unreliable sometimes.

“Come on,” he urged, giving Kamukura's shoulder a light push with his mechanical hand. “I want to walk a bit further. Please?”

Kamukura does get up, albeit quietly and sullenly. Almost like a temperamental child.

“As you wish.”

Even those romantic words are marred by such a dour tone. As is expected from such a person. He doesn't mind.

We're still together after all.

--

Along the mountains, he had once visited relatives. There was a village and a shrine at the base and miles upon miles of bamboo. It was an isolated community, but a closely knit one. His relatives not only knew the area by heart, they also knew every one of their 'neighbors' by name. It was a kind of comfort he may have yearned for.

Even back then, he couldn't stay for long due to his luck. Accidents occurred and his presence was believed to be a curse. The other kids threw rocks and yelled at him to leave. He had no choice but to accept this was how things were.

But, now...

"Round, round, go round, Water wheel, go round," he hums, skipping on ahead. *"Go round, and call Mr. Sun. Go round, and call Mr. Sun..."*

There had been no one in that village, save for the occasional stray animal. The winds still whistled through the reeds, carrying with them countless murmurs and chitters of wildlife.

"Birds, bugs, beasts, grass, trees, flowers," he recounts. *"Flower, bear fruit, and die. Be born, grow up, and die."*

The shrine had been pretty thoroughly demolished. Despite getting chased away, he still cleaned and tended to it alongside his relatives. He'd even get praised for it with kind words and soft pats on his head. Back then, he had enough of an ego to preen.

"Still the wind blows, the rain falls. The waterwheel goes round." He pauses, looks out towards the expanse. He breathes in. *"Lifetimes come and go in turn. Lifetimes come and go in turn."*

The words echo back at him coldly. Huffing, he's all too eager to keep bouncing forward. He's delighted with what he sees ahead.

"Look, Kamukura-kun! The house is still standing! Aha! How lucky!"

He can't rush too far ahead, obviously. He's still weak and lacking in stamina, not to mention the scaling required. Perhaps, then, they should have remained in the remnants of that village. It certainly would have been more practical than this.

It's Kamukura Izuru's fault for not arguing. Kamukura Izuru's fault for simply going along without a word. It's Kamukura Izuru's fault for indulging him. Kamukura Izuru, Izuru, Izuru.

Even now, Kamukura is following him so obediently.

You're the kind of person that kids would throw rocks at, too, he couldn't help but think spitefully.

"Go round, come round, come round, O distant time," he sings, just to drown out his companion's silence. *"Come round, call back my heart. Come round, call back my heart..."*

"Birds, bugs, beasts, grass, trees, flowers," is suddenly droned from behind. Beautiful and melodic, albeit so perfect it doesn't sound remotely human. *"Teach me how to feel..."*

"If I hear that you pine for me," Komaeda continues, much louder than before. *"I will...return to you..."*

--

When they arrive at his relatives' once home, Komaeda is struck by how the modest building still stands. Dilapidated, yes. Deserted, most certainly. Kamukura had immediately brushed past to confirm it.

"No one had died here," he informed, as dull in tone as it was helpful. "It was merely abandoned. The village, too, had been evacuated."

"Is that so?" Komaeda asked cheerfully. As he stepped closer, the scent of mildew and rotted wood grew stronger. It hardly bothered him. "I hoped everyone had good travels." Then, to the house, he says, "Please forgive us for staying here."

He gives a quick, polite bow before straightening up and beaming at Kamukura Izuru.

"Supposedly, our ancestors were bamboo cutters. Descended from the same village that Princess Kaguya once lived in, but I don't know how true that is. I think they just told me that for the sake of an overly romantic tale." He has to stop himself from kicking off his shoes once he steps inside. He has to open the windows to air out the stench, covering his nose with his arm. "This place was so cozy. I liked it a lot. Hence why I thought to visit."

"We will have to wash the futons if we are to stay here," Kamukura said dryly. "As for food, foraging would be ideal. Hunting is also an option. There are birds."

"Lucky us," Komaeda hums, folding his arms upon the window sill. He looks up to the trees. They hardly look worse for wear. "It seems that despite the severity of the world at large, this place has not been too poisoned by despair."

Kamukura Izuru fetches the futons and blankets. He already gets to work on carrying down the mountain to wash in the river. Komaeda does watch him go sullenly, saying nothing more.

"It's a nice place, isn't it," he says, long after Kamukura's figure has disappeared down the mountain.

--

If I had grown up here, had been completely unremarkable just like every other child... I wonder what would have happened? Well, there's no point in pondering that for long. If I had been ordinary, I would have died without a fuss.

Because he had been dealt such an abnormal hand, he ended up fussing quite a bit upon waking up. Everything had irritated him from the eternally summer sun to the frantic bustling of everyone else. He had almost wanted to shut himself away completely—but rather annoyingly, Kamukura Izuru hadn't allowed that. Literally and metaphorically, Kamukura Izuru had broken down his walls.

As if Kamukura Izuru's utter nihilism hadn't been foundational in this world's destruction! But, perhaps, that was part of the reason why. Not that he really cared to ask. Not just because asking would be embarrassing.

Really, it was Hinata Hajime's fault to begin with. He thinks that, but he doesn't really blame Hinata at this point. Nor does he blame Kamukura, really. Kamukura had been taking care of him, so while he does feel exasperation and annoyance, his gratitude towards Kamukura Izuru can't be overstated.

So, then, what would you say my feelings are? Well, I have too many of them to sort through. I also have so many useless feelings that need to hurry up and dissipate.

Useless feelings like—wishing things had been better. Regret over how things turned out. Wishing that the world had been different from the start. Regret that he and Kamukura Izuru properly met sooner. It wouldn't have mattered either way. Back then, he thought hope could only be attained through talent—that hope itself was an absolute good that could be achieved through stepping over despair.

Even before meeting her, he had been so incredibly foolish and brainwashed.

It really would've been much simpler if I were born and raised here without any luck to speak of. What a useless feeling. And yet... Kamukura-kun agreed to indulge in that useless feeling.

It's not because of that indulgence that he waits loyally for Kamukura Izuru to return. Like a dog. It's *nothing* like that. He just gets bored by himself. He only lights up when Kamukura Izuru returns because it would have been so beyond horridly boring otherwise.

"Kamukura-kun, Kamukura-kun!" He calls, waving and excited for the change of pace and nothing else. "I dug up...bamboo shoots...! And even a few berries! I got my hands pecked at, but—we'll have a real feast!"

He presents the basket with pride. Kamukura doesn't even give it a cursory glance before getting to work on plucking the pheasant he caught.

"The soil is still tainted here," he says. "It would be unwise to eat anything grown, at least before I extract the contaminations."

"Ehe, really? Shame, I'm rather nostalgic for the just eating the shoots right out of the ground..." He had used to do that. He had the image of Kamukura Izuru doing the same—but Kamukura Izuru had never really been a child, had he? "I'll wait. Thank you for informing me."

"You already were aware of this," Kamukura retorted immaturity, pinching feathers between his fingers. "You acted on a whim and pretended it was for my sake. Why do you even bother to obfuscate your nature when I know the truth?"

"If you know the truth, there's no point in telling you," he shot back just as immaturity. With how dirty his hands are, he has half a mind to run off to scrub them clean. It's only because it would be a tedious trek back that he refrains. "Do you ask questions just to be patronizing?"

"No, I do not." It's such a quick and blunt response. Such precision. No hesitation. As expected of Kamukura Izuru. "While I can assume your motives and predict your justifications, I do not need to leave it at that."

Why not? The old you would have. You find me boring, right? Even now? I'm not going to presume that's changed simply because you've been nice to me as of late. Even so...

"You've become such a considerate man," he murmurs, setting the basket aside to sit close to the other. While admiring the intricate and practiced (talented) motions of his long fingers plucking away the plumages, he does more intently study Kamukura Izuru's face. Even now, that aloof expression gives nothing away. "I wonder... What happened? Is that Hinata-kun's influence? Matsuda-kun's? Do you even remember him? She didn't. So, maybe it wasn't him. Perhaps, it's *Naegi-kun* we have to thank?"

Nothing is given away, even when he presses.

"What about *Nanami-san*?" He pauses, and then shook his head with a laugh. "Maybe it's out of spite towards that wretched girl. Or those wretched scientists who made you. Maybe Matsuda-kun? Do you remember Matsuda-kun? Or not? Maybe it's just those others. Maybe it was The Steering Committee who ordered your existence to begin with." He does mull that over. He does wonder what that was like—Kamukura Izuru's background was something out of a sci-fi horror, after all. He finds...he doesn't like thinking about it. "Maybe the simulation really did change you. Were you re-programmed? Re-wired, perhaps? Restarted so that you'd be a little more impressionable once more?"

"Are you done?" Kamukura Izuru asks, coldly and with such a clear expectation that Komaeda's mouth can't help but clamp shut. Kamukura Izuru doesn't look at him directly, but he maintains that effect with the ease of divine beings staring down upon mortals. "What do you hope to achieve with such rubbish prattle?"

"Hope...? Don't insult me." Smiling meekly, his head ducks. "It's more that... I'm sincerely curious about you, despite myself. That time we met on the boat might as well had been a lifetime ago."

Back then, the two of us were so riddled with despair that we were little more than rotted remnants of a person. To have even assumed humanity would have been laughable. And, yet...

His mouth shuts, pressing into a long thin line.

If it's such rubbish, then I shouldn't bother.

They sat there in silence. Tucked away in the countryside, ruffled by the breeze brushing past the mountainside. Besides the plucking, he can hear the whipping of wind. Birds singing, bugs buzzing, leaves rustling—he couldn't even taste a hint of poison. Wasn't that wonderful?

It made for such a peaceful image for just the two of them...just the two of them...

"It's so different from the island," he found himself whispering. "There's—there's no one for miles upon miles." He finds himself trembling. "It's open. It's free. We're...not contained."

"Which is why I agreed to take you here." Kamukura doesn't pause. He's collected as ever, and yet... "You hated Jabberwock. I hated it as well. I need to cook this. Wait one second."

Just like that, Kamukura pulls away from him to focus on his task. Komaeda does watch him go, surprised.

"Ka..." He stops himself. Flustered, he can only drop it for now.

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It was *shameful*, he thought. It was utterly shameful the way he broke down, but how could it be any other way? He had resigned himself to die, and yet, he instead woke up. Woke up shaking and coughing up fluids, hurting and hating that he was still alive, that his suffering had not yet ended. Whether or not he had wanted to die in his last moments was irrelevant, he had still felt *cheated*.

He wanted to kick and scream. Ultimately, he ended up going along with everyone else's wishes to survive. To face the future as if he hadn't known from the start that he had no future. Someone like him—

"I don't belong here," he had said, cheerfully and cordially. "But I can't deny the kindness I've been shown. Despite my wretched inferiority, they still want me to survive." He had laughed and laughed, laughed until his wheezing nearly broken his voice. "It's just because they feel obligated. No matter what I do, I can't convince them otherwise. This community, this very atmosphere—it's so infuriating. I can't stand it. I can't stand being here."

He had only ranted to him because he thought Kamukura Izuru was the one person who wouldn't react. Wouldn't judge. Wouldn't even *care*. He knows he's hopelessly stupid, but, seriously, who could fathom the opposite?

Who could have imagined the soft intake of breath, the glimmer in Kamukura Izuru's downcast gaze, and the words that followed?

"Shall we leave together, then?"

It had felt so much like a dream that Komaeda couldn't say no.

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“Oh, right,” he remembers. “Kamukura-kun, you didn’t think you’d survive the simulation either, did you?”

Kamukura is watching the meat cook. There *is* life, however, in the fires flicking within his gaze.

“We’re the same, huh,” Komaeda remarks, glum yet gentle. He chuckles softly into his hand. The futons have been hung up to dry and looking at them is somehow embarrassing. “We’re both so unlucky, then! Imagine that! Hahaha...”

Kamukura is quiet, but it’s a heavy quiet. One weighted with so much potential. Potential *what*? He’s almost too afraid to inquire.

“I... I’m grateful that you agreed to take me here. It’s a nice spot, isn’t it? Do you think I’ll be allowed to buy it? I wasn’t able to grow up here, but I wouldn’t mind growing old here, even if it’d be lonely by myself.”

“The others would visit,” Kamukura says. “The princess would find this place quite charming. The coach and the gymnast would find it a suitable training ground. There is also—”

“What about you?” He can’t help but cut Kamukura Izuru off. The presumptuousness is muffled by pleas and desperation. “I want—I want you to visit, too, Kamukura-kun. Actually, I...”

I wouldn’t mind if you stayed with me. But how can I say that?

“We can come back here.” Kamukura does look at him, then. It’s a look of expectation, but, it’s also a look of hope. “I do not mind it,” he says in the tone that anyone else would use for “I *want* to.”

We’re not friends. We’re barely acquaintances. Kamukura Izuru is a cold person who often can’t be bothered to get along with others. I’m a wretched someone who’s never been able to properly connect with anyone. Despite that, or perhaps because of it, we understand one another more than anyone else.

“I want to,” Komaeda says, in that very tone. “I also want everyone else to visit. I want to make sure they’re all alright. Do you think they’re happy I left? Or—do you think they’re worried about me?”

“They’re worried. They were worried when I told them we were going, after all.”

It’s such an easy admission. Made while Kamukura picks apart the cooked meat and prepares two plates. He offers Komaeda one, and Komaeda can only accept it graciously. Once he takes a bite of the meat, he can’t help but break into grateful tears.

“I-It’s good,” he chokes out, sniffing. “It’s, it’s really, really good, Kamukura-kun. T-Thank you so much...”

Kamukura rubs his back kindly as he ends up blubbering. It's inelegant and humiliating, but for some reason, he doesn't mind at all. If anything, he leans against Kamukura Izuru as if the two of them had been long-time partners.

Artists Featured

In order of appearance

Antropix ( @antropix_,  @antropix_art)
SorrelArtz (  @sorrelartz)
Lil_recyclebin ( @lil_recyclebin,  @binboi444)
Max (  @grapes0dap0p)
Huilen ( @huilenblue_arts,  @blues_doodles)
Feli (  @felithorr)
Chris ( @mocha_pie,  @mocha_pie_)
Leghost ( @yourghostbf,  @legghost)
Alex ( @harspoonz,  @striiiderse)
Smokin' Silver ( @SmokinSilver,  @smokinsilversketches)
Wil (  @limeade_arcade)
Kara ( @ThisIsMiceCity)
Zac (  @franukuu,  @franukuu_)
Whale (   @revletos)
Clownne ( @clownne)
Zauber ( @yukiangel51,  @zauber_artblog)
Hannah ( @anemersi)
Richie ( @chuuyak1sser, @crypticcart,  @asheijiz)
SoldierEl ( @Sold1erEl,  @_soldier__el)
Kyeon (   @kyeonwa)
Breadinks ( @breadinks)
Kutsune (  @Kutsunee)
cryptidsock (   @cryptidsock)
KiKiD (  @KikiD484)
Mikuzura ( @mikuzura,  @mikuzura.art)
Anu ( @achillian_nidai)
Gen ( @gen_draws)
Alex (  @itsalexhenry)
TheRareHunterHunter ( @TheRareHunterHunter,  Rarewishes)
Ashxen (  @AshxenVinter)
Aunejoii (  @aunejoii)
Ara ( @metaname,  @metanamed)
Kit ( pepperprinces,  @apollohollow)
Bren Bonniere (   @Brenbonniere)
Flo ( @_flowster)
Kota ( @meshimeow,  @nyagitokomeowda)
Clover ( @_sugarlipx_,  @sugarlipx)
Nancy ( @nancymoron)
Magpie ( @magpied_illustration)
Riuke ( @riuke-doodles, @dingdongrumba,  @Riuke_z)
Lainey ( @xkozumikkuxx)
Tiff ( @eaglider)

Writers Featured

In order of appearance

Neon ( @doomtemp,  @DoomedTemperament)

Sarah ( @SarahDoesGaming,  @sarahroeser)

Bit ( @president-homewrecker,   @presidenthomewrecker,
 @CreativelyTrash)

Ally ( @lonely-lgbt-writer,  @Lonely_LGBT_Writer)

Mamichigo ( @mamichigo,  @ma_michigo,  @Mamichigo)

Magi ( @magiofftheseas,  @starrylitme)

Merch Artists Featured

Alpaca ( @alpaca.sir,  @like-an-alpaca-sir,  @LikeAnAlpacaSir)

Blake (   @glowbugthunder)

Jordie ( @jordie.bun,  @jordiebun,  @jordie_bun)

Wub (  @wubling_k)

This zine was organized by 🐦 @anemerssi

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🐦 @achillian_nidai

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📺 @nancymoron

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